DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 760 EA 032 055

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TITLE	Same-Race and Cross-Race Matching. Technical Assistance Packet #7.
INSTITUTION	Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA.; Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR. National Mentoring Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Justice, Washington, DC. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.; Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	2002-05-00
NOTE	36p.
CONTRACT	1999-JG-FX-K001
AVAILABLE FROM	Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main St., Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204. Tel: 503-275-9500; Tel: 800-547-6449 (Toll Free); e-mail: info@nwrel.org; Web site: http://www.nwrel.org. For full text: http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packseven.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mentors; *Program Development; Racial Differences; *Racial Factors; Racial Relations; *Student Development; *Volunteer Training

ABSTRACT

All mentoring programs have to make decisions about which available adult volunteer to match with which specific child or youth. The issue of same-race matching is often a particularly difficult one for these programs. In the section "The Question of Race," this technical assistance packet provides an overview of the debate over same-race and cross-race matching. It outlines arguments used in defense of such matching, looks at research results that examined the strength of mentor-youth relationships and outcomes for youth in both kinds of matches, and provides cautions about those research findings. The next section, "Considerations for Program Practices," suggests practices that programs can consider implementing to address philosophical and practical implications. The last section, "Training Mentors in Cultural Understanding," provides information about conducting training in cultural understanding and includes suggested activities. Most cross-race matching involves white mentors and African American mentees, and thus, this document focuses on those matches. However, much of the information is applicable to any kind of cross-race matching, as well as to issues that can arise when the mentor and mentee are from different ethnic backgrounds. A brief conclusion and list of resources conclude the text. (RT)

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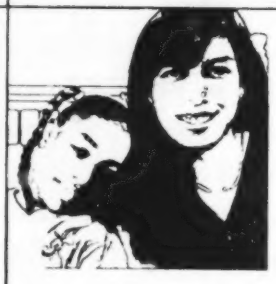
Technical Assistance Packet #7

SAME-RACE and CROSS-RACE MATCHING



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This project was supported by Award No. 1999-JG-FX-K001 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PACKET #7

Same-Race and Cross-Race Matching

May 2002

written by:

PPV

PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES

published by:

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

produced with support from:
OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Linda Jucovy wrote *Same-Race and Cross-Race Matching*. She would like to thank Carla Herrera, of Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), for providing information about matching considerations in school-based mentoring programs. Also at P/PV, Jean Grossman provided feedback on a draft of this technical assistance packet. Suzie Boss, of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), edited the material, and Michael Garringer, also at NWREL, handled the design and production. The JUMP technical assistance project is being managed by Mark Fulop, at NWREL; Jean Grossman, at P/PV; Joyce Corlett at BBBSA; and Jayme Marshall, at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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INTRODUCTION

All mentoring programs have to make decisions about which available adult volunteer to match with which specific child or youth. While programs might use a number of criteria for deciding on a match, many particularly want to match their mentees with adults who share similar characteristics—including gender, ethnicity, and race.

The issue of same-race matching is often a particularly difficult one for mentoring programs. Many practitioners believe that youth are best matched with mentors of the same race. However, it can be challenging to achieve this for every minority youth. Across mentoring programs, 15 to 20 percent of adult volunteers are members of a racial minority, as contrasted to approximately 50 percent of the children and youth who have, or have applied for, a mentor. For programs committed to same-race matches, the result is that minority youth may spend a long time on a waiting list until a mentor becomes available (Rhodes, 2002).

Each program has to make its own decisions about the complex issue of same-race and cross-race matching. The following pages are intended to help inform those decisions:

- The second section, "The Question of Race," provides an overview of the debate. It outlines arguments used in defense of same-race and cross-race matching, looks at results of research that has examined the strength of the mentor-youth relationships and the outcomes for youth in both kinds of matches, and provides cautions about those research findings.

- The arguments and research about same-race and cross-race matching have both philosophical and practical implications for programs. The third section, "Considerations for Program Practices," suggests practices that programs can consider implementing to address some of those implications.

- All mentors, regardless of whether they are matched with youth of the same race, could probably benefit from training in cultural understanding. And for mentors who are a different race than their mentee, such training is critical. The fourth section, "Training Mentors in Cultural Understanding," provides information about conducting this training and includes suggested activities.

The material ends with a brief conclusion and a list of additional resources.

Most cross-race matching involves white mentors and African American mentees, and thus, this technical assistance packet focuses on those matches. However, much of the information is applicable to any kind of cross-race matching, as well as to issues that can arise when the mentor and mentee are from different ethnic backgrounds.

THE QUESTION OF RACE

Few studies have focused on the role of mentors' and youth's race in shaping the course and outcomes of relationships. As a result, there is little systematic knowledge that addresses critical questions about the relative importance of making matches on the basis of shared race. At the same time, people often have strong convictions about this issue, opinions rooted in their beliefs about racial identity, community, and the history of racial experiences in the United States.

Clearly, there are no right or wrong answers to the question of same-race and cross-race matching. Instead, this section is intended to help practitioners understand the range of views. It summarizes arguments on both sides of the issue and presents findings from research that has compared relationship development and outcomes in same-race and cross-race matches.

WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF SAME-RACE MATCHING?[1]

Supporters of racial matching offer arguments in two large areas.

1. ***The quality and effectiveness of the relationship between the mentor and youth.*** Shared race plays a critical role in establishing effective mentor-mentee relationships because:

- An adult of a different race cannot help a youth learn how to cope in society—that adult cannot understand what it feels like to be a minority in America. Minority youth inevitably internalize the racial attitudes of the larger society and, thus, are vulnerable to low self-esteem and to restricted views of their possibilities in life. Only a mentor with a similar racial background can fully understand these challenges and help frame realistic solutions.

- White, middle-class mentors may experience powerful negative emotions such as guilt and defensiveness in relation to this country's history of racial injustice. These mentors' primary goal might be to "save" at-risk youth from the perceived "hazards" of their environment by engaging them in "mainstream" activities, rather than developing a mentoring relationship that is built on trust and support.

- Minority adolescents may feel that their white mentors are judging them according to negative stereotypes. That fear of being judged could make it difficult for the pair to develop a relationship where there is trust and sharing.

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[1] The arguments in support of same-race and cross-race matching are adapted from a review of the literature included in "Volunteer Mentoring Relationships with Minority Youth: An Analysis of Same- Versus Cross-Race Matches." Jean E. Rhodes, Ranjini Reddy, and Jean B. Grossman, with Judy Maxine Lee. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (in press). Also see the National Mentoring Partnership's web site (www.mentoring.org), where Jean Rhodes has summarized some parts of that article in the March edition of her "Research Corner."

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2. ***The cultural identity and shared responsibility of the black community.*** The issue of same-race matching extends beyond individual mentor-youth relationships—it has larger social, political, and historical implications. Same-race matching is important because:

- Culture is deeply internalized, providing racial groups with a sense of history, heritage, and continuity. A mentor who is not representative of a youth's racial background will subconsciously and inevitably impose his or her cultural values on that youth and, thus, potentially undercut the mentee's cultural identity.

- Providing minority youth with mentors of a different race will send the wrong message. It will convey to youth that the people they should model themselves after are not of their own group, or that there are not enough adults from their own community who can serve as positive role models.

- Racial communities should help their own and foster a sense of solidarity. The black community is becoming increasingly segregated along class lines, and its members need to remember their common responsibility to one another. Mentoring is an important mechanism for forging these ties.

Thus, for supporters of same-race matching, issues related to race are intrinsic to youth's healthy development. And it is the responsibility of the community to support those youth with mentors of the same race.

WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF CROSS-RACE MATCHING?

Many supporters of cross-race matching acknowledge that differences in race potentially could affect a mentoring relationship. However, they defend their stance with arguments in two large areas.

1. ***Same-race matching may expedite the development of trust, but it does not guarantee a successful mentoring match.*** This is because:

- The qualities of the mentor, rather than race, are what matter the most. The mentor's personal skills, experience, common interests with youth, capacity to provide sensitive support, and openness to the nuances of cultural differences are the keys to building a trusting relationship.

- Differences in socioeconomic status may be a more important concern than differences in race. Social distance—whether it occurs between mentor and mentee of different races or the same race—can cause the mentor to misunderstand the young person's problems, thoughts, needs, and strengths. Skilled and sensitive mentors have succeeded in bridging these social distances, and they can bridge racial differences as well.

2. ***Rather than a liability, cross-race matching can be beneficial.*** This is because:

- It can break down racial barriers by exposing both mentors and youth to cultures that previously might have made them uncomfortable. Proponents of this view emphasize that it is essential for the mentors to engage in activities that enhance mentees' knowledge of their (the mentee's) heritage and culture, and that mentors receive training to help them develop cultural sensitivity.

- Beyond the potential benefits to individual youth, cross-race matching also can contribute to the dismantling of societal barriers. It symbolizes people working together, trying to improve the life changes of youth, and fostering a sense of community among historically separated people.

Many supporters of cross-race matching believe that the issue is one of making the best of reality. Most mentoring programs have long waiting lists, and minority youth (especially males) are likely to wait the longest if programs are committed to making only same-race matches. The benefits of a cross-race match can outweigh a long wait.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SHOW?

Is race an important factor in whether youth do or do not form strong relationships with their mentors? Do same-race matches result in more positive outcomes for youth than cross-race matches? As controversial as the issue of race-based matching can be, there has been very little research on those aspects of it. However, two studies of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) agencies provide some preliminary findings.

The quality of relationships in same-race and cross-race matches

One study found that mentors and youth in same-race and cross-race matches were almost equally likely to form strong relationships (Morrow & Styles, 1995). However, the mentors were often concerned about the cultural differences that could make it more difficult to form a strong bond with their mentee. In some cases, they viewed these racial differences as only one part of a larger gap—including age and socioeconomic distance—that they had to bridge. As one mentor said:

> *[What's been the most challenging is] being able to identify with her—to know where she's coming from. I don't know what it's like to be 13 anymore. I don't know what it's like to grow up in that kind of situation. [Her] culture is very different. I mean, you have to be aware of that.*

For others, the difference in race led them to question their potential value as a mentor. One, for example, worried:

> *I think I may not be as good a role model for him. I mean, when you say you're white, you know, you've got more opportunity. Whereas, you know, if I'm black, I don't have as much chance as you, or something like that. I think that may be the most difficult part. He may not look up to me as much, I think, because I'm white. But maybe not. I don't know—I just kind of sense that anyway.*

Despite their concerns, most of the cross-race mentors proved adept at handling these differences. In fact, the black youth who had white mentors saw few, if any, problems in being matched with an adult of a different race. As one youth said:

> *At first, I was scared to come in because I felt like I'd be embarrassed, and then I realized that there wasn't anything to be embarrassed about. Because I'm used to being around whites and blacks, and I don't care about the color of the skin, because I think they're the same people. It's fine [having a white mentor]; he seems like a black person.*

In addition to the BBBS evaluation, a recent study of 669 mentors in a wide range of programs similarly found that race was not a central factor in whether or not the mentor and youth formed a strong relationship. That study focused exclusively on the mentors' perspective, and from their point of view, cross-race matches were as close and supportive as same-race matches (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000).

Outcomes for youth in same-race and cross-race matches

A second study of BBBS agencies compared outcomes for 190 minority youth who were in same-race or cross-race matches (Rhodes, Reddy, & Grossman, in press). The matches were followed for approximately one year in order to measure a range of outcomes for youth, including changes in their feelings of competence in school and in their relationships with parents and friends; whether they had begun to skip school; and whether they had begun to use alcohol or drugs.

Adolescents in same-race matches were somewhat more likely than adolescents in cross-race matches to report that they had begun to drink alcohol. Apart from that, there were no meaningful differences between the two groups, overall, on any of the outcomes. When gender was taken into consideration, a few additional group differences emerged. In particular, girls in same-race matches placed a higher value on school than did girls in cross-race matches. Boys in cross-race matches reported spending more time doing homework and feeling less competent in school than boys in same-race matches reported.[2]

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[2] It is important to be cautious about interpreting these differences as being causal. The youth's parent or guardian gave approval for each match, and this could have affected which youth were and were not placed in cross-race matches. Parents or guardians who were most worried about their child might have agreed to a cross-race match because they wanted their child to have a mentor as quickly as possible, while other parents/guardians felt more comfortable waiting until their child could be matched with a same-race mentor. Thus, while boys in cross-race matches felt less competent in school than boys in same-race matches, this may be because those were the youth who were initially struggling most in school and whose parents/guardians were most concerned about having them matched quickly and so accepted a mentor of a different race. Similarly, while girls in same-race matches placed a higher value on school, it may be that those were the girls who already cared more about school and whose parents/guardians felt less urgency about matching them with a mentor and, thus, felt comfortable waiting for a mentor of the same race.

The study also examined youth's responses to more than 125 questions regarding characteristics of the mentoring relationship. Compared to youth in same-race matches, youth in cross-race matches reported that they were more likely to talk to their mentors when something was bothering them and perceived their mentors as providing more unconditional support. There were no differences between the two groups' responses on any other items.

Parents and guardians of the youth also were surveyed. Again, there were almost no differences between responses by those whose children were in same-race matches and those whose children were in cross-race matches. Parents of youth in cross-race matches were more likely to say that the mentor tried to build on the youth's strengths and provided opportunities to go to places—such as recreational events—that the youth wanted to visit. Those parents also were more likely to say that the mentoring relationship had led to improvements in their child's peer relationships. Apart from those items, however, there were no differences between the groups.

WHAT DO THE FINDINGS SUGGEST?

Taken together, the research findings suggest that race, in itself, does not play a significant role in determining whether or not a mentor and mentee form a strong relationship and the extent to which that relationship leads to positive changes for the youth. While there were a few differences in outcomes when the same-race and cross-race groups were further differentiated by gender, those differences do not seem to suggest a pattern. In fact, the findings suggest that the effects of race on relationships are subtle and act in combination with other factors (such as gender and the mentor's interpersonal style) to shape the ultimate influence of mentoring.

However, these findings are very preliminary. There are several cautions attached to them:

- They are based on a small number of matches. The BBBS study of relationships, from which the above quotes are drawn, included only 26 cross-race matches. And the outcomes study is based on findings concerning 190 minority youth—125 of them were in cross-race matches and 65 were in same-race matches.

- Most of the findings are from evaluations of BBBS agencies, which typically have highly systematized matching processes, carefully train their mentors, and provide ongoing monitoring and support of the matches. Thus, mentors and mentees of different races were likely to have been matched on the basis of other similarities, such as shared interests and geographic proximity. Once the mentor and youth began to meet, the case manager responsible for the match would have checked in regularly to identify problems that might have been arising and to help work out solutions. All these practices can help mitigate challenges that might be inherent in cross-race matches.

- The outcomes study did not include the full range of potential effects of mentor-youth relationships. For example, the study did not measure changes in youth's cultural pride. Thus, it is possible that minority youth in same-race matches enjoyed benefits that were not captured by this study – or, similarly, that minority youth in cross-race matches gained benefits that the study did not assess.

Thus, the research, to date, offers no definitive answer to the question of same-race and cross-race matching. However, it does suggest that under the right conditions, youth in cross-race matches enjoy many of the same benefits as youth in same-race matches. Programs can be flexible about considering cross-race matching without feeling that they would be shortchanging youth – if effective practices are in place for deciding on other match criteria, training mentors, and supporting and monitoring the matches.

At the same time, research on mentoring cannot, alone, ever resolve the issue of same-race and cross-race matching. The arguments in defense of each side are not based only on the potential benefits of individual mentoring relationships. They are embedded in deeply held beliefs about race, community, and history.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAM PRACTICES

The question of same-race and cross-race matching is both a philosophical and practical issue for programs. Programs might want to make only same-race matches but not have sufficient numbers of minority mentors. Given this reality, they might decide to introduce some cross-race matching into their program. However, while research findings suggest that these matches can be as successful as same-race pairings of mentors and youth, there are still a variety of concerns that programs need to consider, ranging from community and parental attitudes and beliefs to practical matters of providing additional training and support for mentors. This section looks at program practices that can help address some of those issues.

1. THINK ABOUT A RANGE OF POSSIBLE MATCHING CRITERIA.

A few mentoring programs use a "natural" matching process – they bring groups of adult volunteers and youth together for activities and allow the mentoring pairs to form on their own as adults and youth are drawn to one another. In most programs, however, staff members make the decision about which youth to match with which adult volunteer, generally based on a combination of intuition and specific matching criteria.

Each program's matching criteria will vary, depending on its goals and the population of children and youth it serves. But as the studies of BBBS suggest, attention to criteria other than "same race" can help programs make good matches when same-race mentors are not available.

Many programs, for example, believe that having at least some kind of "similarity" between the mentor and youth is an important criterion. Almost all programs (especially community-based programs) are committed to same-gender matches. Many programs also match mentors and youth on the basis of shared interests. Other common criteria include the mentor's attitudes and temperament, special needs of the youth matched with special talents of the mentor, and the geographic proximity of the mentor and youth.

Along with identifying the matching criteria that it considers important, each program has to decide how flexible it will be about specific criteria. For example, if "shared interests" is an important criterion for your program, are there circumstances in which you will make a match where there are no identifiable shared interests between the adult volunteer and youth?

2. CONSIDER THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMUNITY-BASED AND SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS.

The setting in which the mentor and youth meet can make a difference in the criteria programs use in their matching decisions or, at least, in how flexible they

are about the criteria. One recent study, for example, found differences in the ways that matching criteria were used by community-based and school-based programs (Herrera, et al., 2000).

The study looked at mentors in 35 school-based and 29 community-based programs around the country. While both types of programs tended to create matches based on shared race, gender, and/or interests, school-based programs did so less often. (See Table 1 for the differences.)

TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES IN MATCHING CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL-BASED AND COMMUNITY-BASED MENTORING PROGRAMS

Match Characteristics	School-based Programs	Community-based Programs
Same-race matches	66%	74%
Same-gender matches	77%	88%
Matches with shared interests	67%	86%

(Herrera, et al., 2000, page 24)

There are several possible explanations why the school-based programs made fewer same-race (and same-gender and shared-interest) matches:

- Enrollment processes affected the matching practices. The community-based programs typically had ongoing enrollment, and processing a youth's application and locating an appropriate mentor could take months. In contrast, the school-based programs were more likely to conduct the majority of their intake near the beginning of a school year. Mentors were required to commit to the program only for that school year, and thus, matches had to be made quickly so the pair would have sufficient time to develop a relationship. This necessity might, in some cases, have precluded attempts to match mentors and youth on the basis of similarity.

- There was a smaller selection of youth with whom a mentor could be matched. The school-based programs tended to have relatively short waiting lists--49 youth, on average, who were often spread across as many as 10 to 12 school sites. Typically, mentors identified the school in which they wished to work. Because of the small number of youth on the waiting list, the mentor, by necessity, might be matched with a youth of a different race and different interests and, perhaps, different gender. Community-based programs had an average of 137 youth on their waiting lists, and so were more likely to be able to identify a youth who had more similarity with the mentor.

- Matching on the basis of similarity might not have been as important to the goals of the school-based programs. Typically, these programs were more likely to consider a youth's specific school-related needs and the ability of a mentor to address them when determining appropriate matches, rather than whether they were of the same race or gender or had interests in common. In addition, the more rigid structure of school-based programs might have made "similarity" less important—mentors and mentees met in a designated location at a designated time, and it was easier for programs to monitor the frequency of meetings and progress of the relationship.

However, one characteristic of school-based mentoring programs suggests that making same-race matches might be important, at least in some cases. Meetings between a mentor and mentee that take place in a school are visible to the youth's peers. At certain ages—especially in middle school—peers' opinions are very important. Programs should consider whether having a mentor of a different race would feel uncomfortable to youth in particular schools.

3. ASSESS THE SITUATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

In some cases, considerations about same-race and cross-race matching might be related to larger issues of race that are important in particular communities. For example, there could be opposition in a community to cross-race matching because of the belief that youth need same-race role models if they are going to develop self-esteem. For reasons such as these, some communities—as well as some program's board members and staff—might be uncomfortable with, or strongly opposed to, cross-race matches.

If your program wants to make cross-race matches (or feels that it needs to because there are too few same-race mentors) but there is opposition in your community, you should be prepared to provide convincing arguments about why such matches are acceptable. These arguments could include information based on research (see previous section), as well as information about relevant program practices, including, for example, a commitment to ensuring that black youth who are matched with white mentors also have regular, structured interaction with positive black role models.

4. OBTAIN THE PARENT'S OR GUARDIAN'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE PROPOSED MATCH (PARTICULARLY IN COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS).

Community-based mentoring programs typically require that the child or youth's parent or guardian give approval for a match with the specific mentor the program has selected. In one study of mentoring programs, the agencies' staffs reported that parents and guardians rarely rejected a potential match, including matches with mentors of a different race (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993). However, as others have pointed out, this acceptance might not signal a positive endorsement but, rather, resignation to the situation—the parent or guardian could be worried that if she rejects the match, it might result in a long time on

the waiting list for a mentor or even cost her child the opportunity to be matched with a mentor at all (Sutton, 1992).

Thus, a parent or guardian's lack of opposition to her child's being matched with a mentor of a different race does not necessarily mean that she supports the match. To more accurately gauge parents or guardians' attitudes, programs can ask them, when their child is being enrolled, whether they would be willing to have their child matched with a mentor of another race. Parents are likely to be more open about their feelings at this point, rather than when they are asked the question in the context of a specific potential mentor, after that mentor has been selected and the match is ready to get made.

5. HAVE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN PLACE FOR MONITORING AND SUPPORTING THE MATCHES.

Programs need to have practices in place to be sure that the mentor and youth are meeting regularly, to monitor the quality of their developing relationship, and to help address problems that may be arising between the pair. While all matches should have this kind of program support, cross-race matches may require additional attention to ensure that cultural differences do not interfere with the match relationship. (See the Technical Assistance Packet, *Supporting Mentors*, for details on this topic. Information for obtaining a copy is included in "Additional Resources" at the end of this material.)

6. PROVIDE SPECIAL TRAINING IN CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING FOR MENTORS IN CROSS-RACE MATCHES.

All mentors have to learn to deal with cultural differences—at a minimum, their mentees belong to a different generation and, in many cases, there will be socio-economic differences as well. However, mentors in cross-race matches will particularly benefit from training in cultural awareness. (See the following section for suggested approaches to that training.)

7. IF YOUR PROGRAM HAS BOTH SAME-RACE AND CROSS-RACE MATCHES, CONDUCT A SELF-ASSESSMENT TO LEARN IF THERE ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM.

Are mentors and youth in your program's same-race matches meeting more often than those in your cross-race matches? Do a higher percentage of the cross-race matches end quickly? It is relatively simple for programs to collect data on the frequency of meetings and how long the relationships last, and then, to make the comparisons. In addition, if your program measures outcomes for youth—such as school attendance or staying out of the juvenile justice system—you can similarly compare the outcomes for youth who are in same-race and cross-race matches.

If there are differences between the two groups, find out why and develop strategies to address the problems. For example, if cross-race matches are less

successful, is it because the mentors are not receiving the training they need? Does your program need to offer more ongoing support to mentors to help them deal with cultural discomfort? Or, you might discover that more of your same-race matches are ending quickly. If so, why? Perhaps your program is putting so much effort into training, monitoring, and supporting mentors in cross-race matches that it has forgotten that all mentors benefit from this support and has, thus, neglected its same-race mentors.

TRAINING MENTORS IN CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

All mentors could probably benefit from some training in understanding cultural differences—in learning to recognize their own values and possible biases, and similarly recognizing and accepting values of their mentee that may be different from their own. Mentors and mentees are likely to have at least some values that tend to conflict—they are, after all, two people who are separated by age, and there may be socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial differences as well. Thus, while programs will particularly want to ensure that mentors in cross-race matches receive training in cultural sensitivity, they might want to consider such training for all their mentors.

This section provides suggested approaches for training mentors in understanding diversity and respecting values that are different from their own. It begins by discussing some initial considerations for the training. Next, it suggests several icebreakers that introduce the concept of values, and then presents two activities that provide opportunities for mentors to look more closely at their mentees' values and the ways those values might manifest themselves as the relationship develops. The section also includes three readings that can be used as the basis of discussions. All the material here can be adapted so it more directly addresses the specific characteristics of your mentors and the children and youth with whom they are matched.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Values are very personal. Everyone has strong feelings about what she or he believes in. At the same time, many people have not thought explicitly about their values or been asked to talk openly about them. However, during training in cultural sensitivity, participants are asked to do exactly that. They will be identifying their values, looking at where their values came from, and understanding the ways in which these values affect their daily lives. This is an important part of helping them, as mentors, develop the ability to be nonjudgmental about values that mentees or mentees' families may hold which seem to conflict with their own values.

Thus, in planning trainings that focus on cultural sensitivity, it is important to select an appropriate trainer. Be sure that person is knowledgeable about the particular challenges of this type of training and also understands your program. If the trainer is from outside your program, take the time to meet to discuss your program's goals, the population of youth it serves, and the backgrounds of the group of mentors who will be participating in the training.

Trainers should also be:

- ☐ Sensitive to the fact that there is likely to be a great range in the level of awareness that participants have about their personal values, and understand their role in helping participants develop an appropriate level of awareness.
- ☐ Sensitive to group dynamics and intercultural conflicts.
- ☐ Not too cautious—they must be willing to deal with people's potential discomfort with the topic. They must be willing to ask the hard questions when necessary.
- ☐ Not ideological or polarizing—they would risk alienating some of the people who are participating in the training.
- ☐ Able to create a "safe climate" in which individuals feel comfortable talking about their preconceptions and their possible biases.
- ☐ Clear about their own values and careful not to impose those values on participants in the training.

A good trainer can help participants look closely at issues of race (as well as class, age, ethnicity, and gender) and begin to identify their own stereotypes and prejudices. But it is also important to recognize that these issues cannot be solved immediately and painlessly.

ICEBREAKERS

Icebreakers "warm up" participants in a training session, help them become comfortable in the group, facilitate team building, and introduce them to the content of the training. The following icebreakers should give participants the experience of seeing that different people—and different cultures—might hold different values, and that those values are neither right nor wrong.

1. Choose *one* of these questions to ask the group:

- ☐ If you suddenly were given $1,000 to use in any way you wished, what would you do with it?
- ☐ What do you like to do best when you have free time?
- ☐ If you had the power to change one thing in your community, what would it be?

Have them write their answer on a piece of paper or a 3" X 5" card. Then go around the room, asking each person to give her or his name, read their answer, and explain why he or she gave that answer. How does the answer reflect a value that the person holds?

2. Ask participants to look in their purses/wallets/briefcases/pockets or on themselves and find something that represents or symbolizes some aspect of their values or lifestyle. (It could, for example, be an organization membership card, a photograph, a piece of jewelry, or almost anything else.)

When all the participants have found something, go around the room asking each to give her or his name, show the chosen item, and explain why that item is representative or symbolic for them. How does it reflect a value that he or she holds?

ACTIVITY:

Thinking About Values

Goals:

- ☐ To help mentors explore their own and their mentee's values
- ☐ To help them develop an understanding of the ways that personal values manifest themselves in daily life
- ☐ To identify situations in which a seeming conflict between their own and their mentee's values has led, or could lead, to discomfort in the relationship

Steps:

1. Ask participants to define the word "values."

2. Then ask them for examples of values that are particularly important to them—values that influence how they lead their daily lives.

3. Ask them to think for a minute about how and where they got their values. These are some of the possible questions you can ask to guide the discussion:

- ☐ Where do your values come from?
- ☐ How did your family, school, community, religion instill values in you when you were growing up?
- ☐ Did contact with friends or others outside your family challenge those values? How did you reconcile these differences of view? (Think of a specific time/a specific example.)
- ☐ Did you *choose* the values you hold?

4. Ask participants to think for a minute about some of the values that are important to the child or youth they are mentoring. These are some questions you can use to guide the discussion:

- ☐ What are one or two of your mentee's values? (Remind them about the confidentiality requirements of your program and that any information they hear during this discussion about any children or youth or their families may not be repeated.)

- ☐ How do you know they are the child or youth's values? How have the values manifested themselves during your meetings?

- ☐ In what ways are the child or youth's values similar to, or different from, your values?

- ☐ Where do your mentee's values come from? (In general, they would arise from the same sources as the mentors' values—family, community, etc.)

- ☐ To what extent are the sources of your mentee's values different in specifics—although the broad categories are the same—than the sources of your values? How are they different? (For example, what is different about mentees' racial or ethnic background and their traditions and beliefs? What is different about mentees' family life? About the communities that they are growing up in?)

5. Ask if differences between their own and their mentees' values have ever led them (the mentors) to feel uncomfortable, or if the differences have been a potential source of conflict. Encourage them to give examples and to discuss how they tried to handle the situation. As participants talk about those experiences, ask if other members of the group have had similar experiences and, if so, how they have responded to those situations.

6. Introduce this quotation:

> ***"Problems are only opportunities with thorns on them."***
> —Hugh Miller, *Snow on the Wind*

Ask participants to identify the opportunities that are present in an apparent values conflict with their mentee. (For example, it might be an opportunity for them to learn about their mentee, and to help their mentee clarify his or her feelings, figure out how to solve a problem, or think more clearly about one of his or her values. They should also see that it is NOT an opportunity to be judgmental, to give unwanted advice, or to impose their own values.)

ACTIVITY:

Role Plays

Goals:

- ☐ To increase mentors' insight into their mentee's feelings and values.
- ☐ To practice ways to respond positively and supportively to their mentee in situations where there is an apparent conflict in values.

Steps:

1. Organize participants into pairs. Give each pair one scenario to work with. (Sample scenarios are included below. You may want to create your own scenarios that describe situations that more closely reflect your particular program and the children or youth who participate in it.)

2. Ask each pair to:

   - ☐ Discuss their scenario, identifying the issues that are involved and the values that seem to be underlying those issues.
   - ☐ Use the scenario as the basis for two role-plays of a conversation between the mentor and child or youth. The same person should play the "mentor" and the same person the "mentee" for both role-plays. The first role-play should exemplify how the mentor should NOT respond. The second role-play should exemplify a more positive response.
   - ☐ If time allows, they should then switch roles and do the role-plays again.

3. After about 15 minutes, bring the whole group back together. Ask for a pair to volunteer to give their two role-plays. The pair should describe the scenario, note what it decided the major issues and underlying values were, and give both its negative and positive role-plays. Have other participants give feedback after the role-plays.

4. As time allows, have other pairs describe their scenarios and the potential values conflict, present their role-plays, and receive feedback.

Sample scenarios for role plays:

1. Your mentee, who is 14, has told you she wants to be a lawyer when she grows up. She is very smart but has never achieved highly in school. You know that, recently, she has not even been going to school regularly. Today, when you go to the school for your scheduled weekly meeting with her, your program's

school coordinator takes you aside and says your mentee's truancy has become a serious problem. Later, when you bring it up with your mentee, she gets mad and says, "I'm not learning anything worthwhile. School is boring."

2. Your mentee is 15, and you know he likes to party. Recently, he's been talking a lot about his new girlfriend, who is 14. During your meeting today, he tells you that he's pretty sure his girlfriend is pregnant. It sounds to you as if he's bragging about it.

3. Your mentee is 13 and often works after school and on weekends babysitting children in the neighborhood. She is a diligent worker and has told you that she's working because she wants to start saving money now so she can go to college. You have helped her open a savings account, and she deposits a small amount of money every few weeks. When you meet with her today, she proudly shows you the new pair of Nikes she's wearing. "Look," she says. "I bought them with the money I saved. They cost $105."

4. Your mentee is 10 years old. When you meet with him today at school, he is extremely sleepy. When you say something about it, he tells you there was a lot of noise in his apartment last night and he couldn't sleep. Later he tells you that the noise was because his mother had friends over and they were drinking a lot. He says he doesn't like it when his mother has her friends over at night because he's so tired the next day it's hard for him to go to school. When your mentee says this to you, you feel angry at his mother.

5. Your mentee is 14 years old. You and he sometimes talk about possible careers. He's interested in learning more about the world of work, so one afternoon after school, you pick him up and bring him to your office. Just after you arrive, you introduce your mentee to a co-worker. Your mentee mutters "hello," and while the co-worker is still just a few feet away, says loudly, "That guy's the worst dresser I've ever seen!"

6. Your mentee is 12 years old. She is a nice person but is very loud and has almost no sense of what is appropriate socially. You are in the supermarket with her, shopping for ingredients for the dinner you plan to make together. Your mentee is talking at the top of her voice, blocking the aisles with your shopping cart, and making a mess of the displays on the supermarket shelves. What do you say?

READING:

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

"Culture," defined in its broadest sense, is the underlying fabric that holds together a person's world—or just about everything that binds one to a particular group and place in time. This includes our language, values, beliefs, customs, rituals, oral and written history, art, music, dance, food, and much more.

Cultural sensitivity refers here to an attitude of respect, openness, and acceptance toward people, whatever their culture. All truly supportive relationships are built on a sense of trust and safety, which comes from a feeling of being appreciated for just the way one is. Therefore, our primary job as mentors is to honor the inherent worth that each child brings into the world and to respect his or her special cultural background. Below are some reminders:

- ☐ Honestly examine your own mind for prejudices and stereotypes. Almost all of us have learned some.
- ☐ Think about where our biases come from and try to see them as learned misinformation.
- ☐ Make a personal commitment to be culturally sensitive as a mentor.
- ☐ See your mentee, first and foremost, as a unique and valuable person.
- ☐ Approach cultural differences as an opportunity for learning.

(Adapted, with permission, from *Everyday Heroes: A Guidebook for Mentors*, by Jim Kavanaugh, 1998, Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, "Los Sabios," and Injury Prevention and Emergency Medical Services Bureau, Public Health Division, New Mexico Department of Health, p. 23.)

READING:
DEFINITIONS

Values
General principles that are of fundamental importance to people—such as equality, tolerance, honesty, privacy, security, or education. People generally feel strongly about their values, although they may find them difficult to articulate.

A person's individual values may develop during childhood as a result of the influence of family, peers, religion, culture, and society in general. Values may also change over time.

A person's values greatly affect his or her opinions and attitudes, as well as decisions that person makes in such important areas as education, work, and friends.

Stereotyping
Believing that all people in a certain group think or act alike. A stereotype represents an oversimplified opinion. The term comes from the printing industry—a stereotype is a one-piece printing plate cast in metal from a mold taken of a printing surface, such as a page of type. It is rigid and unchangeable.

Prejudice
A judgment or opinion (positive or negative) about someone that is made before all the facts are known and is usually based solely on his or her race, ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, or other characteristic. "Prejudice" comes from a Latin word meaning to "prejudge." In the legal profession, "prejudice" means "injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights."

Discrimination
Acting in favor of, or against, a person or group of people because they are different in some way from another group; acting on a prejudice. "Discrimination" comes from a Latin word that means to "make a distinction."

These last three words and concepts are interrelated. Stereotypes can create prejudice; prejudice can lead to discrimination.

(Adapted, with permission, from "Examining Your Values—What's Important to You?," *Practical Education for Citizenship and Employment: Personal Development*, 1992, Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, p. 17.)

READING:

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

Some mentors talk about "culture shock" when they describe their initial apprehension and lack of familiarity with and/or understanding of the world from which their mentees come. It is normal and natural to feel a certain amount of apprehension about meeting someone for the first time, especially if it's expected that you will become a trusted and trusting friend. Add to that a significant difference in age, socioeconomic status, and/or racial and ethnic background—it's easy to see why this is such an important issue for mentors.

TOWARD A BROAD DEFINITION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Culture is more than race or ethnicity: It encompasses values, lifestyles, and social norms, including such things as different communication styles, mannerisms, ways of dressing, family structure, traditions, orientation to time, response to authority, and so forth. These differences may be associated with age, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. A lack of understanding or appreciation of cultural diversity can result in mentors becoming judgmental, thus undermining the possibility of developing a trusting relationship.

Knowledge is the key to understanding. There are different types of diversity issues, and each has the potential to cause misunderstanding between a mentor and a mentee. However, you can't learn cultural understanding just from a textbook. Talk to your mentee about her background and ancestry, about what life is like at school or home or with friends. Find out why your mentee does and says the things he does. Your program director, other mentors, friends, and co-workers may also have insights into cultural differences.

As you begin to learn and understand more about your mentee, you will be less likely to make negative value judgments. We hope that the following examples will encourage you to explore the cultural context from which your mentee comes.

Ethnic Diversity

If your mentee comes from a different ethnic background, learn about the values and traditions of that culture. This could include such things as the role of authority and family, communication styles, perspectives on time, ways of dealing with conflict, marriage traditions, and so forth. It is your task as a mentor to learn about ethnic diversity from your mentee, from your observations, and from discussions with program staff so you can better understand the context of your mentee's attitudes and behavior.

Socioeconomic Diversity

Mentors might come from very different socioeconomic backgrounds than their mentees. The mentor may have grown up on a farm while the mentee has never

been outside the city. The mentor may own a house while the mentee may not know anyone who owns a new car, let alone a house. A mentee's family may move frequently, perhaps every few months. A mentee may have to share a very small apartment with many people. A mentor must learn that many things he or she takes for granted are not necessarily common to all. These types of cultural differences are commonplace between mentor and mentee and require time and understanding for an appreciation of their significance.

Chronic poverty can cause psychological effects, including stress and depression. Some mentees may develop a "culture of survival" frame of mind. One mentor has talked about how her mentee, who comes from a very poor family, spends huge sums of money on what the mentor considers frivolous things, like a pair of jeans that costs $100. Poverty often prevents people from believing their future holds any promise of getting better. Thus, they have no motivation to save money to invest in the future. It becomes realistic to have a belief in "taking what you can get while you can get it."

Youth Culture

Many of the characteristics of adolescence are normal developmental traits and don't vary significantly from one generation to the next. Rebellion, for example, is a common trait among adolescents, although it may be expressed differently from generation to generation. Most of us, as teenagers, dressed very differently —perhaps even outrageously, by our parents' and grandparents' standards. We did things our parents didn't do; we talked differently than our parents.

Take the time to remember what it was like to be your mentee's age. Think about the following questions:

When you were in [your mentee's] grade—

- ☐ What was a typical day like?
- ☐ What was really important to you at that time?
- ☐ What was your father or mother like? Did you get along? Were you close?
- ☐ Think of your friends. Were friendships always easy or were they sometimes hard?
- ☐ In general, did you feel as though adults typically understood you well?

At the same time, it is important to remember that some things do change dramatically and result in very different contexts and experiences from one generation to the next. There may be significantly more alcohol and drug abuse today than when you were growing up; sexually transmitted diseases are now more common and more dangerous; crime and violence have dramatically increased

throughout the country, particularly in urban areas; guns are widely available and everywhere in the population; violence in the media and in "games" is commonplace; single-parent families have become more common while greater demands are being placed on all families.

One mentor talked about a conversation he had with his mentee about school dances, which, for the mentor, were filled with fond memories of music, dancing, and fun. For the mentee, school dances were dangerous, as gunfire was a common occurrence. It's important to understand the context of your mentee's life so you can understand what she or he is coping with.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH DIVERSITY:

- ☐ **Remember that you are the adult—the experienced one.** Imagine what your mentee must be thinking and feeling. In general, young people of all ages, but particularly teens, believe they are not respected by adults and worry about whether a mentor will like them or think they're stupid. They are coming to you for help and may already feel insecure and embarrassed about the problems in their lives. It is your responsibility to take the initiative and make the mentee feel more comfortable in the relationship.

- ☐ **Remember to be yourself**. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we try to "relate" to young people. We may try to use their slang, for example. Mentees can see through this and may find it difficult to trust people who are not true to themselves.

- ☐ **You may learn a lot about another culture, lifestyle, or age group—but you will never be *from* that group.** Don't over-identify with your mentee. Your mentee realizes you will never know exactly what she or he is feeling or experiencing. Your mentee may actually feel invalidated by your insistence that you "truly know where she or he is coming from."

(Adapted, with permission, from material in *Mentor Training Curriculum*, 1991, National Mentoring Working Group, convened and staffed by the National Mentoring Partnership and United Way of America. Originally appeared in *Guidebook for Milestones in Mentoring*, 1990, The PLUS Project on Mentoring, National Media Outreach Center, QED Communications, Inc.)

CONCLUSION

During the past decade, the field of mentoring has generated large amounts of research and many discussions of effective program practices. The research has demonstrated that a one-to-one relationship between a child or youth and a caring, supportive adult can lead to positive changes in the young person's life. The discussions of effective practices have made clear the kinds of infrastructure that programs need to have in place to support the development of those relationships. Programs must be able to recruit, screen, and train mentors; match them with children or youth; monitor the matches; and identify and help resolve problems as they arise.

In the midst of all this "adult" activity around the field of mentoring, it sometimes seems as though the children themselves recede from our vision. We become so focused on data and theories and all the elements of the business of mentoring that we lose sight of this central fact: Mentoring is about the experience of the individual child or youth with his or her individual mentor. Everything is about that one-to-one relationship, and each relationship is between a unique child or youth and a unique adult.

That is why matching practices are so important to mentoring programs. And that is why, as programs make each match, their focus should be on the particular child or youth they are pairing with an adult.

Each young person is unique—in a different stage of development, with individual needs and individual strengths. Should the adult who will be mentoring that young person be caring, supportive, flexible, nonjudgmental, a good listener, and someone who is able to have fun? Always.

Should that adult mentor be the same race as the child or youth? Maybe. That depends on the program's mission, goals, and priorities; on the preferences of the child's parent or guardian; and on the personal qualities of the mentor. But most of all, it depends on whether it would make a difference in what the relationship can mean for the individual child or youth.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RELATED JUMP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PACKETS

These materials were written by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL). They are available through the National Mentoring Center at NWREL, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204. Phone: 800-547-6339. Or they can be downloaded at **www.ppv.org** or **www.nwrel.org/mentoring**

Building relationships: A guide for new mentors. Jucovy, L. (2001, May).

Recruiting mentors. Jucovy, L. (2001, February).

Supporting mentors. Jucovy, L. (2001, June).

MANUALS PRODUCED BY BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA

These materials can be purchased from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Phone: 215-567-7000. E-mail: national@bbbsa.org.

Pass it on: Volunteer recruitment manual—Outreach to African-American, Latino/a and other diverse populations. (1992). A comprehensive guide.

Targeted volunteer recruitment. (1992). Overviews of specific strategies used by seven BBBS agencies.

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Notes:

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Title: SAME-RACE AND CROSS-RACE MATCHING - National Mentoring Center - Technical Assistance Packet # 7

Author(s): Linda Jucovy, Publix/Private Ventures

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